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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how a policy, that itself becomes the object of analysis, can be embedded within a wider nexus of policies that interact with it, thus affecting the course of its implementation. The research for the paper was built on a pilot study of a merger among three schools. The merger demonstrated how policies originating from the massive central government education reform program had acted as a major constraint on implementation of the merger itself. The paper outlines the study's research design and conceptual framework, and a typology of factors is put forward that relates to other externally initiated policies--policies that were developed from the pilot-study findings. Some examples of factors are explored, followed by a consideration of using such a typology as a basis for further research. The methods of investigation included: focused, interpretive case studies; over 300 semistructured interviews; and a collection of documents at the local education authority level and at the school level. The findings show that the influence of other policies on implementation of the reorganization policy heavily influenced the context of implementation. These policies mostly inhibited implementation of reorganization and policies connected with the central government's education reform program. (Contains 18 references and 3 tables.) (RJM)

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Slipping through the Cracks: Policy Interaction and Implementation of School Reorganisation Initiatives

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Slipping through the Cracks: Policy Interaction and Implementation of School Reorganisation Initiatives

Introduction: Cracks Appear

The purpose of this paper is to explore how a policy which becomes the object of analysis is embedded within a wider nexus of policies which interact with it in varous ways, so affecting the course of its implementation. It will be argued that, to deepen our understanding of the process of educational policy implementation, it is important to include analysis of interaction between the policy under scrutiny and other policies which have some form of impact on it. The influence of such policies is likely to be especially significant in the implementation of complex and large scale policy changes, like school reorganisation initiatives that have taken place in the UK over the last few years. To illustrate this theme, we will draw on selected results from a major research project examining how local education authorities (LEAs) within local government - roughly equivalent to districts in the USA - take initiatives to reorganise provision of schooling by closing or merging some of their schools and changing the age when pupils (students) transfer between institutions.

Although the details of this policy and the types of interaction may be context specific, the principle of policy interaction as a key determinant of the implementation of a particular policy may have wider applicability. The drive towards reform of education in the USA and other western countries has led to multiple policy changes which may give rise to similar and additional forms of interaction, depending on the type of policies and the education system levels from which they originate.

LEAs in England have undertaken an increasing number of school reorganisation initiatives in response to pressure from the recently replaced Conservative central government on LEAs to remove surplus capacity in the schools for which they are responsible, so as to lower the tax burden incurred in maintaining under-used school buildings. At the beginning of the 1990s, there were estimated to be 1.5 million surplus pupil places in English schools (DES 1992). According to a major national survey, more than 70% of LEAs in England had undertaken initiatives of varying scope by 1996. Assisted by a small increase in the school age population, they had achieved a 40% reduction in surplus primary and a 50% reduction in surplus secondary school places (Audit Commission 1996).

The rationale for these LEA initiatives is to bring local capacity for provision of school places more closely into line with present and anticipated needs. The day to day running costs of a half empty school are almost on a par with those for one that is full, so a reduction in the number of schools and redistribution of pupils to fill the smaller number of institutions remaining will bring significant savings over the longer term. School sites that are no longer required can be sold, bringing a one-off windfall to the LEA which is available for reinvestment.

The national legislative framework requires that reorganisation initiatives consist of two consecutive stages: first, the drafting of LEA formative proposals, consultation with interested parties in the locality including parents of schools scheduled to change in some way, and the submission of formal proposals to the central government Department for Education and Employment (DFEE); second, implementation in the LEA and its schools of such proposals as win central government approval. Our research, focusing primarily on the latter stage, indicates that one reason why implementation can be problematic is that reorganisation interacts with a range of other central and local government polices, many of which were not designed for the unusual circumstances to which reorganisation gives rise. Equally, there can be synergistic interaction, other policies complementing the policy at hand. The project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council from January 1996 for two years and nine months.

Our investigation built on a pilot study of a merger between three schools (Wallace 1996a) which demonstated how other policies, mostly originating with the massive central government

educational reform programme, had acted as a major constraint on implementation of the merger itself (Wallace 1996b). Further work was needed to establish the diversity of forms of policy interaction and their consequences for implementation of the reorganisation policy at both LEA and school levels.

We were also concerned to work towards a more sophisticated conception of the policy implementation process. Existing conceptualisations based on mainly North American research (eg Weatherly and Lipsky 1977; Boyd 1988; Odden 1991; Fullan 1991) appeared limited in their explanatory power because their dominant focus on single changes neglected the multiplicity of other past, present and anticipated policy changes and the rest of ongoing work in each institution which formed part of the context of the policy being implemented (Wallace and McMahon 1994). Attention was increasingly turning to the complexity of the change process as a whole within the turbulent context of major educational reform, as a move away from the artificially restricted focus on one change largely divorced from its context. Elsewhere, we have begun to map the characteristics of complexity as expressed in reorganisation initiatives (Wallace and Pocklington 1998), one of which is interaction with other policies.

Fullan (1993) has advocated a new paradigm for understanding the process of educational change which embraces its 'dynamic complexity'. Following Senge (1990), change is viewed as involving more factors than can be taken into account on the ground, and whose interaction cannot be fully predicted, meaning that only limited control is feasible over the change process. A probable contributor to dynamic complexity is the way policies created at different levels beyond schools interact and affect the work being carried out inside them. Reorganisation of schooling is an example of a policy originating outside schools whose implementation can require a radical change in practice at school level, and whose complexity is compounded by the impact of a variety of other externally initiated policies on tasks to implement reorganisation proposals.

Grasping the dynamic complexity of change does not preclude analysis of a single policy, but it does underline the importance of attending to contextual factors in seeking to explain how it was implemented. Our first attempt to undertake this kind of analysis is discussed in the remaining sections of this paper. First, the research design and conceptual framework are outlined and a typology is put forward of factors relating to other externally initiated policies, developed from one created in the light of the pilot study findings. Second, examples of factors found in the present study are examined. Finally, in conclusion, the potential of such a typology as a platform for further research into the dynamic complexity of the change process is considered.

Researching Reorganisation Initiatives

Methods of investigation are qualitative: focused, interpretive case studies (Merriam 1988) informed by techniques of data analysis developed by Miles and Huberman (1994). Data collection, now complete, was undertaken over almost two years, covering the period leading up to and the aftermath of reorganisation. Case studies have been undertaken in two LEAs and 18 of their schools, the latter reducing to ten as closures and mergers take place (see Table I). Data sources are termly semi-structured interviews and collection of documents at both LEA level (focusing on management tasks including liaison with those schools being studied) and school level (concentrating on tasks of managing reorganisation and its impact on staff and governors - equivalent to members of school boards in the USA, but each school has its own governing body). More than 300 interviews have been conducted: three quarters with school staff and governors; a fifth with LEA staff; and the remainder with central government civil servants.

(INSERT TABLE I)

Research questions were derived from a literature review and the findings of the pilot study to which detailed interview questions related. Fieldnotes were taken during interviews, which were also tape recorded. Summary tapes were prepared by referring to fieldnotes, schedules

and documents, and these tapes were then transcribed. Interview summaries were made, feeding into site summaries which formed the basis for cross-site analysis. Matrices were developed to display qualitative data, and the data set was also scanned for broad themes and to explore the contextual complexity of particular interactions.

The theoretical orientation is based on the notion of Bowe and Ball (1992) that policy formulation and implementation constitute a continuous process of interaction between different groups, each seeking to realise their often incompatible interests. Our focus for this paper lies mainly on how actors at different system levels have limited awareness of the consequences of their policies for those at other levels who are, nevertheless, affected. In the UK the main system levels are central government, operating at the national level, local government, embracing LEAs, and institution, including individual schools.

A pluralistic perspective (Kogan 1978) is employed to explain the impact of other policies on implementation of the reorganisation policy at LEA and school levels. Individuals and groups in and around the education system, some of whom are more powerful than others, interact during the course of policy implementation (Lindblom 1983). They use such resources as are available to them to realise their perceived interest: some desired state of affairs that will contribute to the fulfilment of their purposes.

Individuals' knowledge of progress with implementing the policy and any impact of their actions across different education system levels is constrained by their location within their own system level. Those individuals and groups at one level (central government or local government) who act as change agents with responsibility for promoting implementation at another level (mainly schools) may have linkage roles which help to raise their cross-level awareness of the consequences of their actions for those elsewhere. Nevertheless, with large scale change operating across system levels, as in the case of reorganisation initiatives, cross-level awareness will always be limited to a greater or lesser extent. Limited perspectives of policy makers and change agents based at system levels beyond the school appear to be at the root of many policy interactions.

Some of these individuals and groups are connected with the formulation and implementation of other policies, which do not necessarily have any direct relationship with the policy being implemented, but may act in ways that affect it. These other policies were inevitably designed with a particular set of circumstances in mind, and their implications for situations that do not fall into this range may not have been foreseen, let alone intended. Most policies affecting schools are built on the assumption that they are in a relatively steady state. As we shall see, reorganisation initiatives give rise to rather rare circumstances, because they may both kill off and give birth to institutions. These circumstances may expose 'cracks' in other policies because they do not cater for them, causing headaches for those charged with implementation.

A typology of external policy-related factors that, theoretically, may impinge on implementation of a policy at the institution level is depicted in Table 2. It was developed by analysing our data using a grid based on factors identified in the LEA reorganisation initiative in the pilot study as a starting point. There are two dimensions. The three columns refer to the education system levels beyond the institution level where particular factors originate. In the UK context they are generally either central government, local government, or both these levels. The four rows focus on factors connected with other policies originating beyond the institution level. The first pair imply unintended consequences of failure to foresee circumstances to which reorganisation gives rise:

- *policy vacuum* encompasses situations where there is simply no policy to frame particular implementation tasks;

- *policy insensitivity* refers to a gap in the circumstances for which another policy caters which render it insensitive to the one in question, especially where it imposes certain requirements that do not suit the situation, leading to uncertainty over what should be done.

The second pair describe opposing forms of interaction between the planned requirements of one or more other policies and the one being implemented:

- *policy congruence* covers situations where one or more policies enhance implementation of the one to hand;

- *policy contradiction* refers to circumstances where practices associated with one or more policies run counter to the policy in focus, often inhibiting its implementation.

(INSERT TABLE 2)

The numbers in some of the cells refer to the instances of each type of factor revealed by the analysis (as listed in Table 3 below). All the examples of policy vacuum and insensitivity originated at central government level. Congruence between policies concerned both central government and LEAs, as did some instances of contradiction between policies. There was one instance of contradiction between two central government policies. As we might expect, the greatest policy gap occurred between central and local government levels, where individuals and groups working at each level are likely to have limited first hand experience of each other's circumstances. Central government is largely based in London, and there are well over 100 LEAs in England alone. LEA staff are likely to be more directly aware of circumstances in their schools. The LEAs in our study were each responsible for under 300 schools, in an area no more than 30 miles across.

We would not wish to overstate the cross-level awareness gap, however, as there are many formal and informal linkages between central and local levels (for example, through the national school inspection service, the Audit Commission and central government territorial teams, and representation by members of parliament). Equally, LEAs include a variety of linkages (including administrative officers and inspectors with pastoral responsibility for a group of schools, consultative bodies with representatives from teacher unions, and regular meetings of headteachers or principals).

Slipping through the Cracks

The experience of implementing reorganisation initiatives exposed some of the limits of consistency and coherence in policy making within and between central and local government levels. A total of 14 factors impacting on reorganisation was identified, affecting one or both of the study LEAs (as listed in Table 3). Most instances affected implementation of the LEA reorganisation policy; all affected implementation in some of the schools, depending on whether they were to close, merge, expand or contract. Let us look at the operation of the different types of factor in a little more detail.

(INSERT TABLE 3)

Policy Vacuum

The first instance of a policy vacuum was the lack of any allowance in central government arrangements for reorganisation for the enormous amount of effort required to manage the consultation and implementation stages of reorganisation in LEAs and the schools affected. Among the tasks for LEA staff during the consultation stage were drawing up initial proposals, liaising with elected members of the local government's council of elected members, arranging and attending hundreds of consultation meetings with local communities and school staff, revising the proposals, having them ratified by the local council and submitting them to central government for approval. The implementation stage included setting up temporary governing bodies with responsibility for preparing to merge or open new schools, negotiating with governors over redeployment of displaced staff (faculty), encouraging eligible staff to opt for early retirement, planning and securing central government's financial support for new building and refurbishment, and arranging for transfer and redistribution of furniture and equipment from closing schools.

The list of tasks in schools, which fell mainly to headteachers, could be equally long. The same people could be involved in responding to LEA proposals during the consultation stage, then arranging for the closure of the school and supporting staff in gaining redeployment or early retirement. Those headteachers who were appointed as headteachers designate to take over merging schools would have a double workload during the implementation stage, as they might not only be working towards closure of their present establishment but also be planning for the opening of a new institution. The latter tasks could involve working with the temporary governing body to appoint all the other staff, liaising with the LEA architect over building and refurbishment work, negotiating with other headteachers and then removal companies over transfer of furniture and equipment, drawing up a draft school budget, planning the curriculum, and setting up the many routine procedures like staff playground duties.

These tasks had to be carried out alongside the normal load of LEA and school staff - with all the reorganisation activity going on, the pupils still turned up for school as normal throughout the implementation period. A consequence of the policy vacuum was variable overload for LEA and school staff, since extra finance was not available from LEA or school budgets to provide additional staff for the reorganisation tasks. As a result, there was widespread stress, especially at school level where many individuals faced a long period of uncertainty over their future, and occasional problems related to people trying to do too many things at once.

The second area in which a policy was conspicuous by its absence was where headteachers were appointed in a designate capacity prior to the creation of merged or new institutions. At the point where they accepted the offer of such a post, they had committed themselves to contributing to the development of an institution which technically did not exist until the date of reorganisation. Yet until then, they had no formal authority over decisions affecting the new school despite this commitment. After reorganisation, they would have to cope with the consequences of decisions made in the run up to the change by the temporary governing body.

The most important series of decisions temporary governing bodies had to take was to appoint all the staff, so headteachers designate (the first people to be appointed) had a vested interest in contributing fully to subsequent staff appointment decisions. Headteachers designate generally reported few problems with being involved in staffing decisions, but it seemed anomalous that they could to do so on sufferance rather than by right, given that they would take longer term responsibility for the other staff appointed before reorganisation. Speculatively, the vacuum may have become evident only in these very unusual circumstances because legislation on governing bodies and headteachers' conditions of service hammered out in the 1980s was designed for schools whose existence was ongoing.

Policy Insensitivity

There was a substantial number of instances where the content of a central government policy which appeared not to cater for the circumstances to which reorganisation gave rise, so inhibiting implementation activity. First, a central government policy to restrain local government spending on education and other services was to impose a cap on expenditure. In one LEA, central government had consistently capped spending over several years, meaning that money was clawed back from education to shore up other services. LEA financial support for reorganising schools was therefore constrained. Some of the savings to come from reorganisation, which had been destined for reinvestment in education, had to be spent elsewhere.

Second, an incentive to LEAs and local communities where reorganisation proposals entailed new building and refurbishment of existing buildings was the opportunity to borrow money from central government at an advantageous interest rate to fund the work. This policy was tied into the central government annual spending cycle based on the financial year. Money could be released for building work only in the financial year in which it was to be done. This restriction meant that LEAs could receive the money no earlier than April - the beginning of the financial year - for building work connected with reorganisation the following September. The consequence was frequently to hold up the start of planned building work, though it could

sometimes be circumvented by dipping temporarily into LEA reserves. Subsequent slippage because of bad weather led to buildings often not being ready at the start of the academic year, giving rise to additional work for school staff coping with temporary accommodation arrangements, builders on site during lesson times, and having to move into newly completed buildings after the start of term.

Third, legislation on appointment of headteachers and deputy headteachers stipulated that posts must be advertised nationally. The priority among LEA staff was to negotiate with governing bodies to redeploy staff employed in the LEA who would be displaced by reorganisation proposals, as where their school would close. The LEA policy of avoiding compulsory redundancy wherever possible was a lynchpin of their strategy which had persuaded teacher unions to support the reorganisation initiatives. As the number of schools across both LEAs was scheduled to be reduced by over 70, the same reduction was required in the number of headteachers and deputies. Every headteacher or deputy appointed from outside the LEA to a merged or newly created school would stop that post being allocated to a displaced headteacher or deputy from within the LEA.

The upshot was that LEA staff and most governing bodies cooperated in acting according to the letter of the law by advertising nationally, but wording the advertisements in such a way as to deter outsiders from applying. Informal agreements were often struck between LEA staff and governors to appoint displaced heads and deputies, so the national advertising requirement amounted to an unnecessary nuisance from their perspective. Since advertising prolonged the appointment process and introduced uncertainty to the extent that an outsider could be appointed, it caused greater insecurity for displaced headteachers and deputies than would otherwise have been the case. Once again, national legislation appeared not to have taken the unusual priorities imposed by reorganisation into account.

Fourth, schools must be open for a statutory minimum number of days per year, including five in-service training days when they may be closed to pupils. For school staff facing the most radical changes (such as moving out of a building being closed into another which had been refurbished) more time for packing, unpacking and setting up classrooms was needed. LEA staff took the risk of supporting requests from school staff for one or more extra days when the school was closed to pupils so that they could do the moving work during term time. Technically, LEA staff did not have the authority to approve extra closure days, as pupils would not have been able to attend school for the statutory minimum number of days. They took the risk that a parent might complain, hoping that none would do so. Legislation did not allow for the one-off situation of having, literally, to move schools. Many school staff lost a substantial proportion of their summer holiday immediately before reorganisation because of the additional work of preparing to make a good start in the post-reorganisation institutions.

Fifth, over the previous decade, central government had increasingly dictated the categories of expenditure for which its annual grant to LEAs for provision of in-service training for school staff must be used. These categories became closely linked with the extensive programme of central government reform and - needless to say - did not encompass reorganisation. In order to use some of this money to support training connected with reorganisation, LEA staff had to engage in creative interpretation of the categories. Support was limited by the degree to which creative interpretation was possible, set against the ongoing requirement to provide training for the normal range of needs in schools.

Finally, a very stark example of national policy insensitivity to local circumstances concerned inspection of schools due shortly to close. The Office for Standards in Education (OFSSTED), the agency set up by central government to implement its reformed system of inspection, was required to complete the first inspection of all middle schools and secondary schools in England by September 1997. The headteachers of two middle schools in one LEA, which were due to close at the end of August 1997, were notified late in 1996 that the schools would be inspected the following spring, even though they would soon cease to exist and their staff would be dispersed. The inspection system had been introduced, in part, to promote school improvement, and staff and governors were required to produce an action plan for improving the school's performance in response to inspectors' judgements. The exercise

seemed pointless to staff in these middle schools, since the action plan could refer only to maintaining standards for the remaining few months and to preparing for closure.

OFSTED inspectors insisted that the full procedure must be followed, so preparation for closure was held up while getting ready for the inspection. Both schools received a very positive report, meaning that there was little to put into the action plan which could feasibly be addressed before closure. It served merely to confirm the view of most staff that their excellent educational provision was to be destroyed for reasons outside their control.

Policy Congruence

Here we come to a form of policy interaction which represented good news for LEA reorganisation initiatives. There were three instances where central government policies were aligned with local government policies, acting in concert to promote implementation of the reorganisation initiatives. First, LEA staff and local councillors capitalised on the central government thrust to cajole LEAs into removing surplus pupil places by promotng improvement, especially in the conditions surrounding teaching and learning - for example, through improving the school building stock remaining after reorganisation (see Wallace and Pocklington in press).

Second, throughout most of the reorganisation period, central government policy was to facilitate local government early retirement schemes. Financial support was drawn from a central pool of money available to all LEAs. These schemes were a key to enabling LEA staff to deliver on the promise of avoiding compulsory redundancies wherever possible, and in one LEA where a very generous package was offered, to gain teacher union support.

Third, a central government reform beginning in the late 1980s was to introduce a national curriculum based on sequential 'key stages'. The age range of pupils spanned by each key stage matched the traditional primary-secondary system, where pupils transfer when they are eleven years old. This policy was harnessed by LEA staff and local councillors as part of the rationale for reorganisation. Both LEAs included newer systems of first-middle-high schools in some localities alongside the older primary-secondary systems in others. Reorganisation offered a way of rationalising this situation by closing middle schools, changing first schools into primary schools by adding pupils from the earlier years in middle schools, and changing high schools into secondary schools by adding pupils from the older years in middle schools. LEA staff advanced the argument that reorganisation would bring the age of transition between key stages of the national curriculum at age eleven into line with the transition from primary to secondary schools.

Policy Contradiction

Now for more bad news from the perspective of those responsible for implementing reorganisation initiatives. The final set of factors concern negative interaction between policies, the one militating against achieving the stated aims of the other. First, one of the recent central government reforms had been to give governing bodies exclusive authority over appointment of staff (hitherto an LEA responsibility), as mentioned above. Their members were therefore under no compulsion to accede to LEA officials' requests to redeploy displaced staff. Yet LEA staff were expected by central government ministers somehow to engineer the reallocation of staff across the LEA without the formal authority to ensure that it would happen. In a previous reorganisation in one LEA when LEA staff still had control over staffing in schools, it had been possible for them simply to slot displaced school staff into the various vacancies arising. Now they were dependent on the goodwill of governing bodies, whose members were entitled to be concerned solely with what was in the best interests of their own school (as opposed to the interests of staff in the LEA as a whole).

As a result of the change in central government policy, LEA staff had to put great effort into negotiating with governing bodies on behalf of displaced staff, making full use of the incentive provided by the early retirement scheme where appropriate. Early retirement could be very

attractive, not only to staff who were eligible, but also to members of governing bodies standing to gain through the opportunity it might offer to appoint new staff, to make savings within the school budget by appointing a younger replacement on a lower salary, or to lose a member of staff over whose competence they were equivocal. The protracted nature of the negotiations over redeployment and, where involved, early retirement (with no guarantee over the result) added to the sense of uncertainty and insecurity of staff affected.

Second, central government announced the intention to change the policy on supporting early retirement before reorganisation was over in one LEA, although the LEA was already committed to early retirement arrangements which allowed other displaced staff to be redeployed. From April 1997, a few months before the reorganisation date at the beginning of September, individual LEAs would have to pay more than hitherto for the years between early retirement and normal retirement age. In financing the reorganisation initiative, LEA councillors had not budgeted for this unforeseeable policy shift, and the LEA could not afford to pay for the remaining early retirements. LEA staff had to divert their attention into lobbying central government ministers, who eventually relented and delayed implementation until September 1997. Meanwhile, staff affected suffered considerable anxiety over the uncertainty over their future to which the proposed central government policy shift gave rise.

Last but by no means least, a major central government reform of the late 1980s had been to promote a new sector of schools funded at an advantageous rate directly by central government, rather than through LEAs. If a majority of parents voted in favour of opting out of LEA control and central government ministers approved the application, a school could avoid whatever reorganisation plans LEA staff had for it. This escape route allowed staff, governors and parents of schools threatened with closure to apply to opt out of LEA jurisdiction and so remain open. Several schools in one LEA were allowed to opt out, so shoring up surplus places in them that the LEA initiatives were intended to remove. LEA staff and local government councillors were diverted into efforts to persuade parents not to apply to opt out, and significant planned savings were lost in the LEA where schools succeeded. They then competed for pupils with neighbouring LEA maintained schools because they continued to contain surplus places. Here we have an example of two policies pursued by the same government department with diametrically opposed outcomes!

Conclusion: The Search for More Cracks

From this catalogue of influences of other policies (or their lack) on implementation of the reorganisation policy on which we are focusing, it is evident that they formed a major element of the context for implementation with inhibiting and, in fewer cases, facilitating effects. Policies connected with the central government's education reform programme had a particularly marked impact. Where policies constrained smooth implementation of reorganisation, there were occasional highly stressful peaks of crisis management activity at school level immediately before and after reorganisation, as when building work was not completed on time. Planning for implementation in the LEAs and schools was forced to be highly incremental within the unchanging parameters imposed by an immutable reorganisation date, and many staff in schools experienced prolonged uncertainty over their fate.

The research highlights how limited the ability of individuals and groups at one system level can be to make policies on behalf of those at other levels which will cover all eventualities. It points to the need for strong cross-level monitoring strategies to be put in place by the major policy makers, so that cracks may be detected and, hopefully, sealed up before they develop into major gaps between policy intention and practice at the sites of implementation.

A substantial - and possibly international - research agenda is suggested for further exploration of the ways interaction between a multiplicity of policies may help to explain how policy implementation operates. The diversity of interactions is likely to vary with the size of the education system, the number of education system levels and their formal relationship, and the substantive policies introduced at each level for implementation at other levels. Possibilities for focusing policiy interaction research include:

- a single policy with the main unit of analysis being the institution - school or college - level;

- the sequence of policies impinging on a particular level over a given period, focusing on how their interaction affects the implementation of each policy;

- a level within the education system beyond the institution level as the main unit of analysis, whether a single policy or a range of policies is being examined. In the UK, for example, LEAs were made responsible by central government for developing their own policies to implement national reforms in the schools under their jurisdiction;

- the relationship between levels taking both, say, institutional and local or regional levels simultaneously and studying the way factors such as policy insensitivity, or congruence and contradiction between policies at the different levels operate over time (as in the present research);

- the effects of particular factors, singly and in combination, on implementation at the institution level (such as the impact of insensitivity of externally initiated policies towards practices at institution level);

- policy interaction in a variety of national contexts. For instance the UK has fewer levels than the USA (federal, state, district and institution), and the formal relationship between them is different;

- policy interaction in spheres other than education, such as comparative studies of the implementation of central government policies in the public and private sectors.

Policy interaction analysis offers the prospect of enabling patterns of interaction and their impact on policy implementation to be identified in the dynamic complexity of the change process, and may even help to reduce the confusion such complexity generates by rendering some of the contextual factors more identifiable and their impact more predictable. In large multilevel systems characterised by multiple policy changes, it does seem a dead cert that politicians and administrators will continue to develop policies that fall far short of working smoothly and synergistically in the diverse circumstances that occur on the ground. Those at other system levels responsible for implementing such policies therefore need all the help they can get with understanding how policies may interact and how to cope with the consequences.

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Table 1: Main school sites and reorganisation arrangements

LEA	School (& governance)	summary of reorganisation arrangements
borough (schools are in same 'pyramid' of 7 first, 4 middle and 1 high school)	13-18 high, split site) (county) 9-13 middle (county)	one existing site closes, gains site of middle school which will close and become its 11-14 site. Gains 11-13 year old pupils from all closing middle schools to become 11-18 split site school
	4-9 first (county) 9-13 middle (county)	both schools close, merger on middle school site to form 4-11 primary. 11-13 year old pupils transfer to secondary school. First school site to be disposed of * reorganisation takes place over two years, with transfer of some pupils in 1996, completed in 1997
county (eastern area)	4-8 first (voluntary controlled) 4-8 first (voluntary controlled) 4-8 first (Roman Catholic) 8-12 middle (voluntary controlled)	all schools close, merger on middle school site to form 4-11 voluntary controlled primary, using one first school site as annexe. One voluntary controlled and the Roman Catholic first school sites to be disposed of
	4-8 first (county)	LEA proposal for merger but successful application of first school to become grant maintained 4-8 school, subsequently applied successfully to become 4-7 infant school
	8-12 middle (voluntary aided)	Middle school becomes 7-11 junior and remains under LEA control
(North eastern area)	4-8 first (voluntary controlled) 4-8 first (voluntary controlled)	both schools close, merger on one of the sites to form 4-11 voluntary controlled primary. Other site to be disposed of
(central area)	4-8 first (county) 4-8 first (voluntary controlled)	both schools close, merger on new site to form 4-11 voluntary aided primary. Other site to be disposed of, one being developed as an independent infant school
(southern area)	4-11 primary (county) 4-11 primary (voluntary controlled)	both schools close, merger on one site to form 4-11 voluntary controlled primary. Other site to be disposed of
	4-11 primary (voluntary controlled)	LEA proposal for merger but successful application for one school to become grant maintained.
	4-11 primary (voluntary controlled)	Other school remains under LEA control

Table 2: Typology of external policy related factors impinging on implementation at the institution level

Type of External Policy Related Factor	Education System Level(s) of origin		
	Central	Central and Local	Local
Individual Policy:			
• policy vacuum	1, 2 *		
• policy insensitivity	1 - 6		
Policy interaction:			
• policy congruence		1 - 3	
• policy contradiction	3	1, 2	

(* numbers in cells refer to the instances of each type of factor identified in Table 3)

Table 3: External policy related factors impinging on implementation of reorganisation

Type of external policy related factor	System level(s) of origin	Instance	Impact on implementation of LEA Reorganisation policy	Impact on schools undergoing reorganisation
Policy vacuum:				
1	central government	no provision for work needed to manage reorganisation	extra workload for LEA staff	extra workload for school staff
2	central government	headteacher designate no formal authority in designate role prior to reorganisation date	-	constrained planning for post-reorganisation school
Policy insensitivity:				
1	central government	imposition of cap on LEA spending vs LEA need to spend on implementing reorganisation	constrained short term LEA saving	constrained LEA support with implementing reorganisation
2	central government	finance for building work not available until financial year when building to be completed	held back building work	slippage meant some building work not completed in time
3	central government	headteacher and deputy vacancies must be nationally advertised vs priority to redeploy displaced staff	LEA staff negotiated with governing bodies, went against spirit of the law.	uncertainty for displaced headteachers and deputies
4	central government	schools must be open to pupils for a statutory number of days vs need for closure for packing and unpacking	LEA informally supported request from schools, illegally	constrained time available during school terms, increased work to be done during holidays
5	central government	preset categories for in-service training grant to LEAs did not include reorganisation	LEA staff interpreted categories creatively	constrained amount of in-service training available for reorganisation
6	central government	external inspection shortly before schools closed	-	extra work and stress for school staff, held up planning for reorganisation
Policy congruence:				
1	central and local government	reducing surplus places and LEA effort to improve schools	LEA staff planned improvements (eg in building stock)	new start for some schools, improvement (eg in buildings)
2	central and local government	financial support for LEA early retirement scheme	LEA staff used early retirement scheme to avoid redundancies and gain teacher union support	staff benefited from early retirement, enabled others to be redeployed
3	central and local government	national curriculum and rationale for abolishing middle schools	LEA used aligning age of pupil transfer with national curriculum key stages as part of rationale for reorganisation	resources redistributed to post-reorganisation primary and secondary schools
Policy contradiction:				
1	central vs local government	removal of LEA authority over staff appointments vs requirement that LEA staff orchestrate redeployment	LEA staff negotiated with each governing body, relied on incentive of early retirement scheme	uncertainty for staff delayed some decisions
2	central vs local government	abolition of financial support for LEA early retirement scheme vs implementation of LEA reorganisation policy	LEA staff lobbied central government, succeeded in delaying decisions till after reorganisation	uncertainty and stress for staff affected
3	central vs central government	expansion of grant maintained schools sector vs removal of surplus places	LEA staff campaigned to stop schools becoming grant maintained, some loss of savings from planned reorganisations	increase in number of grant maintained schools, showed up surplus places, competed for pupils with LEA schools

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